Tells the Facts and Names the Names

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Our Little Secrets

UNFOLDING NIGHTMARE

We go to press as Baghdad's hospitals admit a hundred casualties an hour and runs out of anaesthetic. Surgeons try to numb up mangled children with short term anesthetics, even these in dwindling supply. Iraqi families who fled into the desert face 100 degree temperatures and no water.

From Basra through to Baghdad it's a scene of devastation, with every bridge and guard post adorned with civilian cars riddled with bullets by jumpy US soldiers. It was not long into the invasion that the London Sunday Times (Murdoch-owned, be it noted,) ran what will surely become an enduring classic of war reporting, by Mark Franchetti.

We did briefly entertain the idea of reprinting it here as a narrative that said everything about what war does to victims and conquerors alike, and how in a few brief hours US soldiers became brutalized killers. But the dispatch is 4,000 words long. You can find it on the CounterPunch website.

Here's how Franchetti began:

"Nasiriya, Iraq: The light was a strange yellowy grey and the wind was coming up, the beginnings of a sandstorm. The silence felt almost eerie after a night of shooting so intense it hurt the eardrums and shattered the nerves. My footsteps felt heavy on the hot, dusty asphalt as I walked slowly towards the bridge at Nasiriya. A horrific scene lay ahead.

"Some 15 vehicles, including a minivan and a couple of trucks, blocked the road. They were riddled with bullet holes. Some had caught fire and turned into piles of black

(**OLS** *continued on page 2*)

Liberation Four Years After

Iraqis, Look to Serbia for a clue to what "freedom" may mean for you.

BY **CHAD NAGLE**

"That is Kosovo," says my Macedonian driver pointing out the window at a ravine by the roadside, piled high with garbage. Four years later, "liberation" in this forlorn patch of the former Yugoslavia looks like a destitute landscape of scrubby fields and abandoned industrial enterprises, ransacked or destroyed buildings, and social breakdown in town after lifeless town. It is a desolate reminder to the world that wars seldom if ever bring the sort of rosy results pledged by those who wage them, and that Iraqis – as they watch their homeland destroyed by American bombs and missiles – have much to beware when the US promises to bring them freedom and democracy by force of arms.

Kosovo is an economic wasteland, a new welfare state adopted by the West in an ex-Yugoslav district that once numbered perhaps two million, but which has been "ethnically cleansed" of most of the non-Albanians who lived there. Kosovar Albanians once enjoyed a life free of taxes or even – for the most part – bills within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Now they are the West's dependents. Except for a construction boom that has produced miles of ugly three and four-story, unoccupied red brick houses, nothing of any substance is produced in Kosovo today. Aid from the "international community" has endowed the inhabitants with copious quantities of construction materials to build residential monstrosities, but these structures now stand empty and windowless, as if in preparation for a mass population drive.

"They've tricked the West into giving them money and materials to rebuild damaged homes", says my driver. "But these damaged homes don't exist, and they just use the resources to put up these houses. They're speculating in real estate by taking over church land, moving in and announcing the ground is their property. They all do exactly the same thing, like a tribe planning its future."

The heavily guarded and conspicuously gigantic US military base, Camp Bondsteel, sprawls as far as the eye can see a short distance south of Kosovo's main city, Prishtina, and serves as the center of economic activity in the province. The locals highly prize the prospect of a job in Bondsteel – in one of the bowling alleys or fast food outlets on the base – since employment opportunities in Kosovo as a whole are so scarce. Despite the paucity of regular jobs for ordinary folk, enough Kosovar Albanians manage to travel to the West to justify regular available flights to destinations like Zurich and Frankfurt from Prishtina airport (regular flights to the Serbian capital, Belgrade, have not been restored since the 1999 war). Smuggling and prostitution are rampant, and people in Serbia and Macedonia seem unable to talk about Kosovo without mentioning illegal trade in narcotics, cigarettes, guns and alcohol.

In Prishtina, which numbers anywhere between a quarter of a million and 400,000 inhabitants depending on who you ask, electricity is available a mere four hours a day. Only buildings like the Hotel Grand – once buzzing with people from the press or international organizations – can count on electrical power around the clock. But even this is thanks to private generators, and guests

(**Serbia** *continued on page 3)*

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Our Little Secrets

twisted metal. Others were still burning. Amid the wreckage I counted 12 dead civilians, lying in the road or in nearby ditches. All had been trying to leave this southern town overnight, probably for fear of being killed by US helicopter attacks and heavy artillery.

"Their mistake had been to flee over a bridge that is crucial to the coalition's supply lines and to run into a group of shell-shocked young American marines with orders to shoot anything that moved. One man's body was still in flames. It gave out a hissing sound. Tucked away in his breast pocket, thick wads of banknotes were turning to ashes. His savings, perhaps.

"Down the road, a little girl, no older than five and dressed in a pretty orange and gold dress, lay dead in a ditch next to the body of a man who may have been her father. Half his head was missing. Nearby, in a battered old Volga, peppered with ammunition holes, an Iraqi woman _ perhaps the girl's mother _ was dead, slumped in the back seat. A US Abrams tank nicknamed Ghetto Fabulous drove past the bodies.

"This was not the only family who had taken what they thought was a last chance for safety. A father, baby girl and boy lay in a shallow grave. On the bridge itself a dead Iraqi civilian lay next to the carcass of a donkey.

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"As I walked away, Lieutenant Matt Martin, whose third child, Isabella, was born while he was on board ship en route to the Gulf, appeared beside me. 'Did you see all that?' he asked, his eyes filled with tears. 'Did you see that little baby girl? I carried her body and buried it as best I could but I had no time. It really gets to me to see children being killed like this, but we had no choice.'

"Martin's distress was in contrast to the bitter satisfaction of some of his fellow marines as they surveyed the scene. 'The Iraqis are sick people and we are the chemotherapy,' said Corporal Ryan Dupre. 'I am starting to hate this country. Wait till I get hold of a friggin' Iraqi. No, I won't get hold of one. I'll just kill him.'

"Only a few days earlier these had still been the bright-eyed small-town boys with whom I crossed the border at the start of the operation. They had rolled towards Nasiriya, a strategic city beside the Euphrates, on a mission to secure a safe supply route for troops on the way to Baghdad. They had expected a welcome, or at least a swift surrender. Instead they had found themselves lured into a bloody battle, culminating in the worst coalition losses of the war (16 dead, 12 wounded and two missing marines as well as five dead and 12 missing servicemen from an army convoy) and the humiliation of having prisoners paraded on Iraqi television."

Bad News, Good News

Fairly soon in the invasion US tv became mostly unendurable, though St Clair has a stronger stomach than Cockburn in this regard. But there wasn't a day that either of CounterPunch's editors were not far better informed about the actual course of events than in previous US imperial onslaughts.

Quite aside from the useful reporting from sources such as Pacifica (most notably Amy Goodman's Democracy Now), and the BBC these days anyone with a hookup to the Internet could not only have CounterPunch's daily stream of reporting and commentary, but a constant flow of information from news agencies around the world, including some very creditable reporting from journalists in such agencies as (Moonie-owned) UPI, or Knight Ridder, which was well ahead of Seymour Hersh in reporting dissension in the Pentagon in the early days.

By far the most reliable military commentary came courtesy of veterans of Russian military intelligence, whose daily assessments of the war (mostly garnered from radio intercepts) were available on Aeronautics.Ru and Iraqwar.Ru, discontinued April 8.

So though those who lament the mighty Wurlitzer of mainstream corporate media in the US have a point about the propaganda flood, we take the position that the situation has improved over the past few years, pending further efforts by the state to control what comes down the cable and phone lines.

The future? Most assuredly continuation of existing nightmare for ordinary Iraqis for years to come. For a sense of perspective read the grand speeches of the British who entered Mesopotamia in 1917, only to face a concerted uprising by Shi'a, Sunni and Kurds three years later.

When war ends most reporters go home, which is why we are printing Chad Nagle's fine, though infinitely depressing account of what Kossovo looks like these days.

As for the rest of the world, it's been placed on alert that the world's premier power is a mad dog nation. Ken Rapoza takes us to Brazil, the disaster of US neo-liberalism in Latin America, and the growing sense of the elites that rule-by-IMF has to end.

You Want a Victory?

We close by offering a victory, over bombing, a victory for the people of Puerto Rico. Here's the announcement: "The Vieques community organizations that struggle for peace invite our brothers and sisters from the Big Island - and elsewhere - to participate in the celebration of the end of bombing on Little Girl Island. The cessation of bombing is an important part of the historic demands of our people, for demilitarization, decontamination, devolution (return of lands) and sustainable development. The activities begin at 12 and one second AM on the first of May." Be there or be square.

So, say not the struggle naught availeth, though it's hard to endorse Arthur Hugh Clough's later line in the same poem about "westward, look, the land is bright". Actually the westward land, the US, is in terrible economic trouble. A housing depression could be around the corner, which could spell disaster. Maybe George W will try to change the subject yet again by going to war with North Korea.

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(**Serbia** *continued from page 1*)

of the Grand still have to do without running water after midnight.

The social and economic disaster in Kosovo can be forgiven, many say, because NATO halted "genocide" by the Yugoslav armed forces. Yet the figures of 500,000 Albanians killed were debunked even before the bombing stopped, and only a few hundred bodies were eventually found, many Serbs or Albanians killed by NATO itself. The Kosovar Albanian guerrilla war for "national liberation" had nothing to do with a drive to avert mass murder, but even after the propaganda-driven war was over the West had to bolster the lie as truth. Those watching the Iraq war on TV in the West should therefore be prepared to recognize similar myth-making by Western governments about crimes, atrocities and "weapons of mass distraction" in Iraq before and after hostilities end.

Today, Kosovo is covered with signs of such "myth maintenance," mostly in the form of gaudy memorials to legendary fallen heroes of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). Giant cornucopias of plastic flowers and hideous roadside cemeteries lie scattered all over the province, testaments to the gratitude with which ordinary Albanians supposedly view the sacrifices of their paramilitary brethren. In fact, the state of many of these ugly monuments is evidence of a less than sincere reverence on the part of Kosovo's current inhabitants for the agents of their freedom struggle.

According to the official history, the US-led assault on Yugoslavia was largely prompted by a massacre of Albanians on January 15, 1999, at the Kosovar village of Racak, where the American envoy of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), William Walker, alleged Serbs had gunned down forty Albanian peasants on a hillside in a crime "the likes of which has not been seen before". Many have disputed Walker's account, raising questions as to whether the US diplomat may have fabricated the incident or been involved in an even more sinister way, like a model of the "Quiet American" from the recent film of Graham Greene's novel. Walker's credibility in the Racak affair was shaky to begin with, since he had served as US Ambassador to El Salvador when death squad activity there was at its zenith (1988-92). Even if the episode did in fact occur as told by Walker, Racak should surely have become "sacred ground" to any Kosovar Albanians retaining memories of victimization by the Serbs. So what does Racak look like today?

The site of the slaughter is a patch of hillside covered with the usual, unsightly plastic flower display and fascistic KLA hagiography, while entrance to the makeshift cemetery is through a dark metal archway with Albanian wording above it. The path up to the Racak massacre site winds past heaps of garbage on either side, and at the base of the hillside down which the murderous Serbs were alleged to have approached the Albanians on that fateful day, junked cars, refrigerators and other large and rusting kitchen appliances contribute to the scenery of this Kosovar Albanian version of Arlington Cemetery. "Immediately after the NATO war, the Albanians took international aid and bought new cars and kitchen appliances," says my driver. "They just threw their old stuff out into the streets and fields, even if it worked perfectly. They wanted new things, like children, and they got them."

The assassinations and mafia rule in Serbia and Kosovo are a sad testament to the merit of "democratization" and "reform" that has come to the region as a legacy of the country's "liberation" by the West.

But is Kosovo safe and peaceful now? "Security decreases every day", says a Serb shop owner in Gracanica, site of a 14th century Serbian Orthodox monastery. "Before, the bus to Belgrade used to have a Swedish escort, but not any more. Maybe they think it's safer now but I don't think it's so rosy. I can't even go to Prishtina." What about the free market economy? "Investment here is all mafia," he says. "None of it is the product of an honest day's sweat."

Then there is the "tyrant" Milosevic, and the democratization of Yugoslavia, another purported result of the West's war. Even if the people of the former Yugoslavia have a few problems, at least they have democracy instead of a vicious dictatorship – so the official line goes. But after Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic was killed by a single sniper's bullet as he was getting into his Mercedes limousine on March 12, the climate of fear that gripped Belgrade was palpable even to an outsider. The government of Djindjic's Democratic Party (DS) decreed a "state of emergency" and started arrests, which reached 1,000 a little over a week later, according to official reports. As if rubbing home a point, televised news endlessly replayed video camera footage of the moment of Djindjic's death, showing the fifty-year-old's tall frame shudder for an instant as a bullet entered his shoulder, pierced his heart, and exited his stomach before he was pushed into the back of the waiting vehicle. One of his bodyguards also took a hit with the same kind of ammunition banned by the Geneva Conventions – an expand-on-impact dum-dum bullet. While the temptation to blame Milosevic for the killing was obvious, no one could seriously believe the ex-President of Yugoslavia was behind it.

"I believe the state of emergency is being used to create a one-party state", says Zoran Belinovac, legal affairs adviser to the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), once a partner with the DS in government but now powerless, without a single minister in the cabinet. "Not even in wartime can you arrest someone and detain them for thirty days without right to a lawyer." The media in Serbia, says Belinovac, already resembles a one-party state's, because a government organ called the Media Bureau controls all media access and content and is completely controlled by the DS. "The situation was barely better before the state of emergency", claims Belinovac. "Under Tito, media always talked about the 'rule of the workers'. Under Milosevic, state media talked about the 'national interest'. But the DS's media game is smarter and more complex. Now it's all about 'reform'. It's enough to say you are a 'democrat' and 'reformer' without having to prove anything." Ironically, in the aftermath of the Djindjic murder the DS removed two judges who had been replaced under Milosevic's presidency.

The man accused of masterminding the killing of Djindjic – Milorad Ulemek, bet-

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ter known as Legija ('Legionnaire,' in reference to his former membership in the Foreign Legion) – is the leader of "Zemun", one of Serbia's two most powerful mafias that, like its rival, "Surcin", is named after a district of Belgrade. Most leading representatives of Serbia's main political parties apparently accept the government's official line: Djindjic started cracking down on organized crime and was rubbed out. But most also accept that the pro-Western Djindjic had long made deals and compromises with mobs like Zemun and Surcin in an effort to consolidate the power of his government and the DS. In fact, Serbian Minister of Internal Affairs Dusan Mihaijlovic – the man directing the state of emergency – even described Legija as a "respected citizen" in a public statement last year.

"Right now state institutions in Serbia are very weak," says Nenad Stefanovic, a correspondent for the news magazine *Vreme*. "The mafias are stronger and better organized than the state."

"I have twenty-four years of service to the state and speak four languages", says a career Yugoslav civil servant who asks not to be named. "Yet they put me out on the street for no reason. I was a state representative, and they have destroyed the state. The economy doesn't work, there are no more professionals in the civil service, and you are obliged to pay taxes from income you earned ten years ago. I have no pension and unemployment benefits are practically nil. Health services are completely destroyed, and now everything is 'private' because of the DS government."

"The current state structures obviously have no authority or influence now," says Dusan Jelicic of the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), still formally chaired by Slobodan Milosevic, now on trial for war crimes in The Hague. "Djindjic was doing a balancing act with the mafia and switched sides from Zemun to the Surcin clan," he claims. "A Croat businessman named Stanko Subotic had even provided Djindjic with a private plane for his official trips. None of this inspired much confidence in the public that the government was acting in the best interests of the people." Now, Jelicic says, no one can criticize the DS or the government. "We can all be arrested."

Even assuming Djindjic was actually trying to clamp down on Serbian organized crime, the West probably cared little about any problems he was having. Former Swiss magistrate Carla Del Ponte, now chief prosecutor at the War Crimes Tribunal at The Hague, had been handing Djindjic longer and longer lists of people to be extradited, until finally Djindjic – himself the key figure responsible for the extradition of Milosevic – had to put up his hand.

"Djindjic told Del Ponte it was ridiculous to indict every single Serb who had been in Kosovo during the war in 1999, but she just kept coming with the lists." says *Vreme*'s Nenad Stefanovic, a frequent reporter on developments at The Hague. "Del Ponte has often said she didn't care about the political circumstances inside individual countries, only the trial of war criminals," says Stefanovic. "Yet the international community and the Hague Tribunal paid a lot of attention to the domestic problems of Croatia, and [UN high representative in Kosovo] Michael Steiner also used to say at diplomatic meetings that although there were clearly a lot of war criminals in Kosovo, if we sent them to the Hague the KLA could retaliate. Nobody paid any attention to Serbia." After the Serbian premier's murder, Del Ponte stated publicly that she had met with Djindjic weeks before his death, and said he had told her in a one-on-one meeting: "They will kill me."

The "international community" has generally treated Carla Del Ponte as above moral reproach, but back in 1999 before her appointment at The Hague, articles from the Swiss and Italian press suggested that Del Ponte tipped off banks in Lugano, Switzerland, that they would be investigated for laundering money from cigarette smuggling. At the height of the Kosovo war, when Del Ponte was prosecuting the Mabetex scandal (in which construction tenders were awarded by the Kremlin to a KLA-tied Albanian named Beghijet Pacolli), Moscow's opposition to NATO's war suddenly evaporated just as Russian President Boris Yeltsin and his family were being implicated. Shortly after that, Del Ponte won the Hague job. However effective her actions in the service of NATO's war aims, Del Ponte probably did little to fortify the rule of law in the Balkans or elsewhere.

Although Zoran Djindjic likely played a destructive role in strengthening Serbian political institutions, his violent removal looks set to plunge the country into further chaos.

So dire has the political, social and economic situation in Serbia become that many people have evidently placed hopes in the ruling government's "state of emergency". A recent poll showed 86 per cent of respondents support the policy as a way of restoring the authority of state institutions in Serbia, and it is no exaggeration to say that memories of the Communist period are overwhelmingly popular among large swathes of the citizenry. Many in Belgrade now pine for the Tito days, just as in neighboring Bulgaria pensioners remember Communist leader Todor Zhivkov's era as a time when the police did their jobs, pensions were paid, and schoolchildren didn't abuse drugs and carry handguns to school.

Many in Belgrade now pine for the Tito days, just as in neighboring Bulgaria pensioners remember Communist leader Todor Zhivkov's era as a time when the police did their jobs, pensions were paid, and schoolchildren didn't abuse drugs and carry handguns to school.

The assassinations and mafia rule in Serbia and Kosovo are a sad testament to the merit of "democratization" and "reform" that has come to the region as a legacy of the country's "liberation" by the West, much in the way that Afghanistan under Western puppet Hamid Karzai – featuring regular assassination attempts and bloody warlords ruling the countryside – offers another example of the hollowness of Western trumpeting of democracy and freedom. CP

Chad Nagle is a lawyer and freelance writer who traveled to Serbia and Kosovo in March on behalf of the British Helsinki Human Rights Group.

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Iraq War's Message to Latin America

By Kenneth Rapoza

A window of opportunity has opened up in Latin America as a result of the Iraq war. The country it opens for widest is Brazil. It is the crown jewel of US interests in Latin America. Brazil's got top-quality human capital, a dynamic culture, world renowned energy and aerospace firms, agricultural land mass, and is a leader in generic AIDS drugs. And it is mired in debt to the tune of some $288 billion, with interest accumulating at roughly 26% annually.

Its debt-to-GDP ratio, a barometer of macroeconomic health, is 63 per cent. A considerable portion of the debt is due in May and June. Now, say leftists, is the time for Brazil to stand up to the Washington-Wall Street policies that have wrought havoc on Brazil's political economy. Washington might even have no choice but to let them do what they want, in an effort to keep the peace.

Brazil's new president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, was elected to give currency speculators the boot and get the country's economy moving. That meant junking the more austere policies of the International Monetary Fund. As matters stand, the Fund has basically lost its legitimacy in the country, if not the region. Such was the conclusion, not of radicals but of nearly a hundred politicians, businessmen and political advisors who attended the World Economic Forum's Latin America Business Summit at Copacabana beach in Rio de Janeiro last November

At one of the closed-door meetings run by David Rothkopf, a business advisor and fan of US "hegemony", as Rothkopf calls it in his Foreign Policy magazine articles, members of Latin America's elites said that they believed their hopes for the future rested on a stable world and no US invasion of Iraq. Barring that, they expected nothing short of a disaster.

Their worst fears have come to pass. Brazil's debt is unpayable. It's not hard to find highly credible sources who will stand by that. Unless interest rates are lowered to single digits and the economy finds a market outside the US for its exports Brazil simply cannot pay its bills. Those who care about these things, like editors at The Financial Times of London, tell their peers to "take their money and run" out of Brazil. FT "Strategies" columnist John Dizard dubbed a March 28 piece just that: "Brazil: Why it's time to take the money and run." The story was positioned on page one, under the newspaper's logo, and with an eye catching Brazilian flag beside it. A similar editorial was written by FT editors on March 31.

The financiers in London and elsewhere are a bit more nervous than usual after a visit to Brazil in late March by Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed. The meeting in the capital city of Brasilia posed a threat to the IMF. Malaysia's government has never followed orders. The Malaysians installed currency controls and put a clamp on the Asian Tiger crisis that nearly ruined the country in 1998. Now it's firmed up ties with China and likely to become part of the world's largest free trade zone.

When Lula was elected, he was seen as more than just the president of Brazil. He was seen as an inspiration to the region. If Brazil tells the IMF that it will no longer follow orders, other countries might follow suit. It is a political move more than it is a financial one. The IMF, controlled by the US Treasury, is a political machine anyway and doesn't necessarily need to be treated like a creditor. It is not interested in renegotiating debts or collecting money It using debts as a means to exercise political control When you ask economists and even the IMF itself, "why not let these countries renegotiate and pay 2% annually," no one has an answer. It's a religion intolerant of opposition.

This "Anglo-American financial model" is now in trouble. South-east Asia rejected the neo-liberal model, with the esception of Indonesia, which is the worst off of all the countries in the region. The Indonesian government is currently thinking of using Euros as a transaction and reserve currency. From 1960 to 1980, the economy grew 75 per cent per capita in Latin America. Juan Valdez was 75 per cent richer in 1980 than he was in 1960. From 1980 to 2000, he was just 7 per cent richer. Argentina grew faster, but then imploded to the point where once-middle class folks can eke out a living selling cardboard to recycling plants.

The nature of the game is changing. Latin America has relied on the US for exports, but US imports of Brazilian goods, for example, are next to nothing (less than 9 per cent of GDP). The entire region wants to form a block similar to the EU. The US government, pushing the Free Trade Area of the Americas, will oppose it and countries like Colombia and Mexico will likely fall in line. Colombia depends on the US for funding its drug war.

South America can't rely on the EU either. The EU's market interests are in Eastern Europe and Eurasia. New trade initiatives between Brazil and Eurasia are in discussion. But that is also against US interests. To have to compete with a Paris-Berlin-Moscow strategic triangle for commercial contracts is too much to bear for the neo-liberals, so "luckily" Hussein turned bad, just in time, and everyone has war on the brain. Death. Darkness everywhere. Development is going to have to wait.

One would wonder why Hussein didn't pummel us with his weapons of mass destruction when we were all blinded by the "new economy" stocks and buying summer homes. We would have been caught looking the other way. Today the world is in a very different financial picture. The bubble has burst. War policy comes in the nick of time. Just when Latin America wants a new model, years after

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South-East Asia has proven to be a success without Washington's help, and just when China, Iran, India and Russia start talking about economic collaboration, terrorists are found where there were none before.

God forbid anyone succeed outside of the Anglosphere, (a term used by "US hegemons" to describe a new English speaking empire running from North America and Britain). It gets worse. Rumsfeld already has his eyes on including Brazil in the war on terrorism. Should the Brazilians get out of line, or their economy implode, US military involvement there will increase, or the drug trade will naturally boom out of social desperation and require intervention. On March 14 and again on March 24, two anti-narcotics judges were assassinated in the state of Espirito Santo.

On March 2 through 4 in Miami, US. Southern Command chief Gen. James Hill spoke at a conference called "Building Regional Security Cooperation in the Western Hemisphere." There Hill demanded that Brazil fall in line with US anti-terrorist efforts or risk being considered an "accomplice state." Hill's policy argues that "drug dealers are taking over ungovernable areas in Latin America; drugs are weapons of mass destruction; and radical Islamic groups associated with Hamas, Hezbollah, al-Gamaat and others" are operating in the Triple Frontier region of Paraguay, Argentina, and Paraná state in Brazil.

Brazil and Argentina deny terrorist activity in their countries and say they are monitoring drug trafficking along the Frontier. Next month, the Organization of American States' Special Conference on Hemispheric Security will take place in Mexico and is likely to come up with policies regarding these ungovernable areas. Latin American foreign ministers are already reaching out to put the brakes on an empire out of control. Brazil, Costa Rica, and Peru's foreign ministers met with Russian president Vladimir Putin on April 1 in Russia. This is the first time the Rio Group–a gathering of heads of state from Latin America–met with a Russian president. The Rio Group called for stronger ties with Russia in relation to development contracts, investment and technological cooperation. They also reiterated their stance against the Iraq war.

Lula has waited his entire adult life for this moment.

It would seem that this meeting indicates a belief that an alternative economic development is one of the keys to derailing future wars, such as in Syria, Iran and North Korea. UN diplomats in Chile and Mexico have come out against Washington's war on Iraq, but that is not enough. Lula tried organizing a South American heads of state meeting to forge a single regional position on the issue, but the idea was panned due to widespread fear of reprisals from Washington. For example, Columbia's president Alvaro Uribe– once again–was unwilling to join Lula's initiative to sign a statement against a unilateral war because, perhaps, taking such a position might compromise US funds used for the drug war.

This wouldn't be the first time that Columbia-Brazil relations were thwarted by Washington. Last November, Gen. Hill "warned" Columbia away from buying Brazilian-made fighter jets, threatening a pull-out of Congressional aid. Columbia got the message. This was widely reported in Brazil at the time. Brazil has a chance to change the rules of the game, or at least get the ball rolling. That's what Lula was elected to do–a "gradual reversal of course"–and if he does not do it, he will be seen as a major let down...at best.

Lula has waited his entire adult life for this moment. Some argue that he's already served the neoliberal model for too long. Washington may not accept a move away from its policies right now, but like-minded individuals in thew US would eventually welcome development and an improvement, rather than a deterioration, of society and its institutions. Over 42 per cent of the population in Latin America lives in poverty. That number is expected to reach 44 per cent this year. That's what the full-market integration policies of the IMF helped create. If Brazilian leaders want to keep those policies in place, they can expect more middle class kids to grow up moving to the US, UK or Australia (illegally) in hopes of making a living delivering pizza and shipping dollars back home. The stakes are high. Brazil knows what US planners are predicting for their country. The future they describe is no future indeed. CP

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The Future of Liberated Iraq? Look at Kosovo

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